

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Bull Trout Draft Recovery Plan and proposed Critical Habitat

Malheur River Recovery Unit (CHAPTER 14)

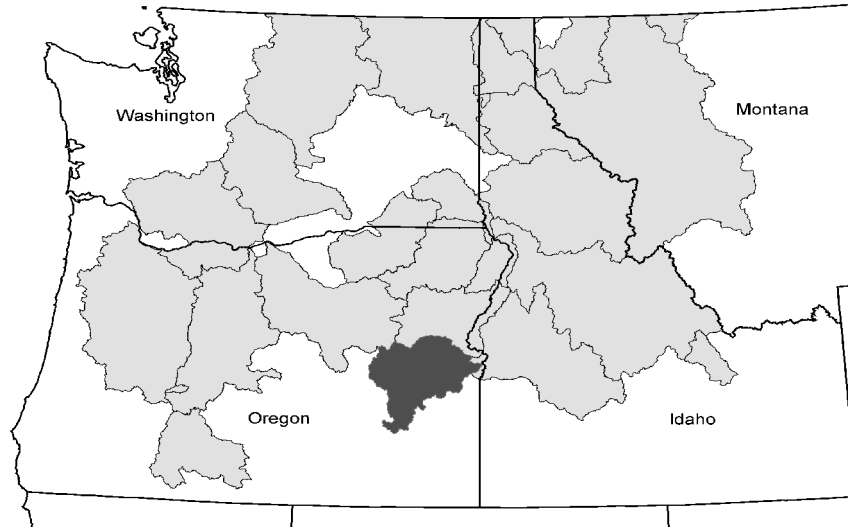
What areas are included in the Malheur River Recovery Unit?

The entire Malheur River Basin is included in this recovery unit. The basin is situated in eastern Oregon, bordered on the south by the Owyhee River Basin, on the north by the Burnt River and John Day river basins, on the west by the Malheur Lakes Basin and on the east by the Snake River, which it enters near Ontario, Oregon. It includes portions of Grant, Baker, Harney, and Malheur counties. The Malheur River Recovery Unit contains one core area, which encompasses the headwaters of the North Fork Malheur River and the Upper Malheur River.

How much of the area is proposed as critical habitat?

A total of 245 miles of streams and 5,926 acres of reservoir area are proposed for critical habitat in the headwaters of the North Fork Malheur River and the Upper Malheur River. This is approximately 3 percent of the waterways in the entire basin.

Who developed the draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal?



The draft recovery plan for bull trout was developed through the collaboration of Federal, State, Tribal and private biologists working with representatives of local watersheds, private landowners and industry and conservation organizations. A total of 24 local recovery unit teams contributed to the development of the draft recovery plans for each of the recovery units. These recovery unit teams included experts in biology, hydrology and forestry, as well as natural resource users and stakeholders with interest and knowledge of bull trout and the habitats they depend on for survival. The critical habitat proposal was based in large part on information developed by the recovery unit teams and supplemented with even more

recent information on the current distribution and habitat characteristics of the species.

What is the relationship between the draft recovery plan and the critical habitat proposal?

The draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal are closely linked. The information developed by the recovery unit teams, and the science underlying that information, are the basis for the critical habitat proposals. However, critical habitat is designed to provide for the conservation of a species by identifying those areas essential for conservation and requiring special management, whereas a recovery plan is a much larger blueprint

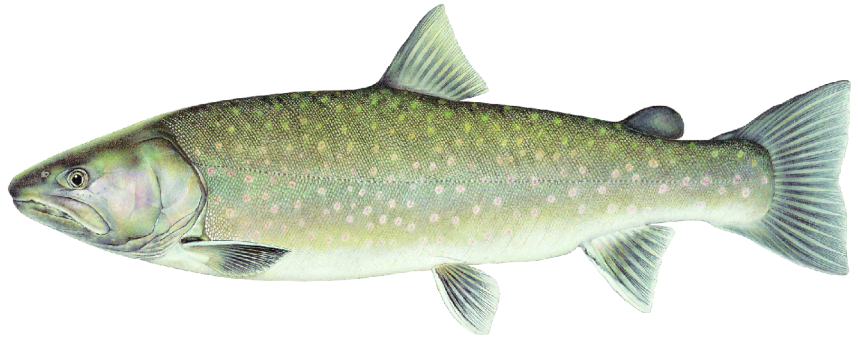
providing guidance for the eventual recovery and delisting of a species.

Who would be affected by recovery efforts and a critical habitat designation?

A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority. It is the Fish and Wildlife Service's estimation of the actions necessary for the recovery of the species. Agencies, communities or individuals are encouraged to take voluntary actions described in the recovery plan to benefit bull trout.

Federal agencies are required to consult with the Fish and Wildlife Service on actions they carry out, fund, or authorize that might affect critical habitat. It is important to note that in most cases, this is already occurring under the section 7 interagency consultation requirements of the Endangered Species Act. Non-Federal entities, including private landowners, that may also be affected could include, for example, those seeking a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit under the Clean Water Act to build an in-water structure, those seeking Federal approval to discharge effluent into the aquatic environment, or those seeking Federal funding to implement private property improvements, where such actions affect the aquatic environment that has been designated as critical habitat. But again, in most cases where this link between activities on private lands and Federal funding,

agriculture, fisheries management,



permitting, or authorization exists, consultation under section 7 of the Endangered Species Act is already occurring.

A critical habitat designation does not have any effect on non-Federal entities when there is not a Federal nexus. For example, swimming, boating, fishing, farming, ranching, or any of a range of activities normally conducted by a landowner or operator of a business not involving Federal funding, permitting, or authorization in order to occur would not be affected.

How was the draft recovery plan for each unit developed?

Recovery units were delineated based on the biology of the species and considerations for paralleling existing state conservation and fisheries management frameworks wherever possible. Recovery teams incorporated existing state conservation processes to the degree possible, depending on the degree to which they had been developed (for example, the Montana Bull Trout Restoration Plan, the State of Idaho's Bull

and actions that fragmented bull

Trout Conservation Plan, the State of Washington's Statewide Strategy to Recover Salmon and the Oregon Plan for Salmon and Watersheds).

What is the status of bull trout in the Malheur River Recovery Unit?

Bull trout populations in the Malheur Recovery Unit are considered "depressed," with bull trout in the Upper Malheur River considered at high risk of extinction. An estimate of current adult bull trout population in the Upper Malheur River is not available. The population of adult bull trout in the North Fork Malheur River is estimated to be between 250 to 300.

What are the threats to bull trout in the Malheur River Recovery Unit?

Prior to the construction of dams, bull trout in the Malheur River had access to the Snake River, which served as a migration corridor and as foraging habitat. Other historical activities such as excessive livestock grazing, timber harvest, irrigated

trout habitat continue to have

lasting effects. Current threats include channel alterations, high water temperature, lack of fish passage, forest management activities, poorly managed livestock grazing, irrigation withdrawals, and nonnative fish.

What are the recovery goals and objectives?

The goal of the bull trout recovery plan is to ensure the long-term persistence of self-sustaining, complex interacting groups of bull trout distributed across the species' range so that the species can be delisted. To recover bull trout in the Malheur River Basin, the following objectives have been identified:

- Maintain current distribution of bull trout within the core area and re-establish bull trout in previously occupied habitats in the Upper Malheur River and tributaries and the North Fork Malheur River and tributaries.

Maintain stable or increasing trends in abundance of bull trout within the Malheur River Recovery Unit. This will require increasing abundance within the two existing local populations (Upper Malheur and North Fork Malheur).

- Restore and maintain suitable habitat conditions for all bull trout life history stages and strategies.
- Conserve genetic diverse populations within the Malheur River Recovery Unit. This can best be achieved by ensuring connectivity between the North Fork Malheur River and Upper Malheur River.

What are the criteria for measuring recovery?

Recovery will be measured according to four criteria: distribution, abundance, population trends and connectivity in the Malheur River Recovery Unit. The recovery plan includes specific, quantifiable standards for each of these criteria.

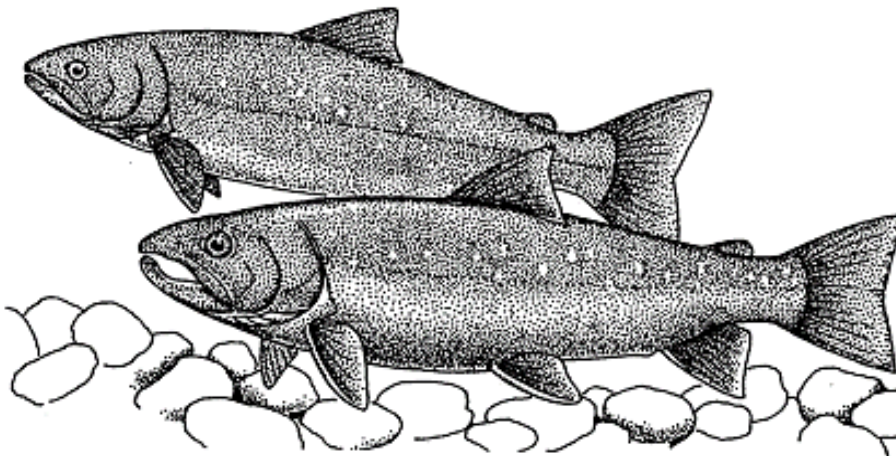
- Bull trout are distributed among two or more local

populations in the recovery unit within the Malheur Core Area.

- Estimated abundance of adult bull trout is between 2,000 and 3,000 individuals distributed between the two local populations.
- Adult bull trout exhibit a stable or increasing trend for at least two generations at or above the recovered abundance level within the Malheur Core Area.
- Specific barriers inhibiting bull trout movement and recovery in the Malheur Recovery Unit have been addressed, ensuring opportunities for connectivity among local populations within the core area.

What actions will be necessary to recover bull trout in the Malheur River Recovery Unit?

The following general actions will be necessary to recover bull trout in this unit; protect, restore and maintain suitable habitat conditions for bull trout; improve passage; and prevent and reduce negative effects of non-native fishes on bull trout. Some of the



specific actions necessary to recover bull trout include; stabilizing roads to reduce fine sediment delivery to streams, providing two-way passage at major dams such as Agency and Warm Springs and the Drewsey diversion, restoring riparian areas, restoring connectivity and opportunities for migration, reducing grazing impacts in bull trout spawning areas, improving flows in certain areas, removing non-native fish where feasible, and implementing fisheries management policies designed to protect native fish. Efforts to recover bull trout and fish habitat are ongoing in the Malheur Recovery Unit with a high level of cooperation between State, Tribal and Federal agencies.

How long will recovery take?

A recovery plan is advisory only and carries no regulatory authority; therefore it is difficult to determine how long it will take to recover bull trout in the Malheur River Recovery Unit. However, given our best estimate of what government agencies and others might do, it could take three to five bull trout generations (15 to 25 years) or longer before identified threats to the species can be significantly reduced and bull trout can be considered eligible for delisting.

How much will recovery cost?

Estimating the cost of recovery is difficult and complex, due to many variables and unknowns. However, the Malheur River Recovery Unit team has estimated

that recovery could cost about \$10 million spread over 25 years. This includes estimates of expenditures by local, Tribal, State and Federal governments and by private business and individuals. The estimates are attributed to bull trout conservation but other aquatic species also will benefit. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is soliciting comments from the public on the estimated costs.

How can I obtain copies of the documents?

The documents, along with maps, fact sheets, photographs and other materials may be found on the Pacific Region's website at <http://pacific.fws.gov/bulltrout>

How can I comment?

The Service will be accepting comments, beginning November 29, 2002, on its draft recovery plan for bull trout in the Columbia and Klamath river basins and in the St. Mary-Belly River Basin in Montana. Comments on the draft recovery plan will be accepted for 90 days, until February 27, 2003. Comments on the draft recovery plan may be mailed to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Snake River Basin Office, 1387 S. Vinnell Way, Room 368, Boise, ID 83709; faxed to 208-378-5262, or sent via e-mail to: fwlsrbocomment@fws.gov

Beginning November 29, 2002, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will accept comments from the public on the agency's proposal to

designate critical habitat for the Columbia River and Klamath River distinct population segments of bull trout. Comments will be accepted for 60 days, until January 28, 2003. Comments on the critical habitat proposal may be submitted to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Regional Office, attn: John Young, Bull Trout Coordinator, 911 N.E. 11th Avenue, Portland Oregon 97232; faxed to 503.231.6243 or e-mailed to:

R1bulltroutCH@r1.fws.gov

A series of public information meetings and hearings also will be held. A public information meeting and hearing are scheduled in Boise, Idaho, for January 14, 2003, at the AmeriTel Inn/Boise Spectrum, 7499 West Overland Road. The information meeting will be from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. The formal public hearing will be from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

This is only a brief summary.

Please see full draft recovery plan and critical habitat proposal for complete details.